

Dharmakutha Commentary for Valmiki Ramayana by Triyambakaraya makhi.

Santhanaraman

This conference paper was made possible due to the grace of Dr. Rangan ji, and also due to the fortune that I worked under him. Every word in this paper has come through the clarity of core principles of Dharma which I have received under his guidance.. Therefore, I dedicate this paper to my guide, Dr. Rangan ji, who is my mentor.

Abstract:

The Dharma found in Ramayana is based on universal welfare rather than conventional strict rules and regulations I.e Vidhi Nisheda

Dharma(Injunctions and

Prohibitions). Trayambakaraya Makhi, in his Dharmakutha commentary, has tried to present the Ramayana from the perspective of conventional Dharma. With the help of that commentary, the Dharma found in Ramayana and other scriptures can be aligned. For instance, in the Vali vadha context, Valmiki Ramayana and so many scriptures condemn the crime of Incest done by Vali by abducting Sugreeva's wife Ruma.

On the other hand in some contexts the scriptures which talk about conventional dharma doesn't align with Universal welfare. For example Manusmriti says, "Women have to always serve their husbands. No other Dharma like doing Pooja is acceptable than taking care of the household. By domestic work only they attain heavens ".(5.155) But in Valmiki Ramayana Kousalya, Rama's mother, had her own Vedic rituals and worship when her husband Dasharatha was not around(2.20.19). This paper serves to show the alignment and contradictions of conventional Dharma with the Universal-welfare-based Dharma, found in Ramayana, and to emphasize a "Living Dharma" rather than rigid rules and regulations.

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Who was Trayambakaraya Makhi?

Tryambaka Makhin (also known as Tryambaka-yajvan or Tryambaka Raya Makhi) was a 17th-century Sanskrit scholar, minister, and ritualist in the Thanjavur Maratha kingdom. He is most renowned for authoring Dharmākūta, a massive scholarly commentary on the Valmiki Ramayana which emphasizes conventional laws and rules.

Role and Patronage: He served as a minister under the Thanjavur Maratha king Shahaji I (reigned 1684–1712), having been trained by the kingdom's founder, Ekoji I. Commissioned to write this work, likely by Serfoji I, it is a detailed interpretation explaining the Ramayana's narrative in the context of Dharmasastra.

He himself says this in his commentary:

एकोजिप्रभुणा गुणान्तरविदा देव्या च दीपाम्बया
बाल्ये यः परिगृह्य वत्सलतया संवर्धितः सादरम् ।
बुद्धीरप्युपदिश्य शाहजिमहीनेतुः स्वसूनोः स्थिरे
सोऽयं मन्त्रिपदे त्रियम्बकमखी स्वातन्त्र्यमासादितः ॥

Meaning:

This very Tryambaka Makhi was taken in during his childhood by **King Ekoji** and Queen **Deepamba**. They raised him with as much affection and care as their own child. Having been educated and guided in wisdom, he was appointed to the firm position of Minister to their son, **King Shahaji**, where he attained full authority (independence) in administration.”

1.Introduction of the Dharmakootha commentary:

His words:

धर्माकृतव्याख्यानस्य उपक्रमः

श्रीमता महर्षिणा वाल्मीकिना श्रीमद्रामचरितं काव्यरूपेण निबद्धम् । तच्च काव्यं व्याख्यातृभिरप्रसिद्धपदार्थकेन दुरन्वयव्यवहितान्वययोरन्वयप्रदर्शनेनापरिपूर्णस्थले अध्याहारकल्पनेन विरोधसमाधानेन च शिवविष्णवादिपरत्वेन च व्याख्यातम् । तत्र कैरपि धर्मे तात्पर्यं न स्पष्टीकृतमिति तत्प्रतिपाद्यते । ननु धर्मे तात्पर्यप्रतिपादनमनुपपन्नं रामयणे सर्वत्र रामचरितस्यैव वर्णिततया धर्मतात्पर्ये प्रमाणाभावादिति चेन्न; 'कोन्वस्मिन्-' इति प्रश्ने धर्मज्ञत्वविशिष्टस्यैव महापुरुषस्यावगमेन, उत्तरवाक्ये 'रक्षिता स्वस्य धर्मस्य' इति धर्मसंरक्षकत्वप्रतिपादनेन, आरण्यकाण्डे 'रामो विग्रहवान्धर्मः' इति रामस्य धर्मस्वरूपत्वप्रतिपादकधर्मद्वेषिमारीचवाक्येन, 'यस्मिन्न चलते धर्मः यो धर्म नातिवर्तते' इति युद्धकाण्डे शुकवाक्येन, 'चातुर्ण्यं च लोकेऽस्मिन्स्वे स्वे धर्मे नियोक्ष्यति' इति नारदवाक्येन, अयोध्याकाण्डे 'विद्धि मामृषिभिस्तुल्यं केवलं धर्ममास्थितम्' इति रामवाक्येन 'धर्मात्मा सत्यसंधश्च रामो दाशरथि यदि । पौरुषे चाप्रतिद्वन्द्वः शरैर्न जहि रावणिम्' इति धर्मस्वरूपत्वप्रतिपादकशपथरूपलक्ष्मणवाक्येन, युद्धकाण्डे 'लोकानां त्वं परो धर्मः' इति ब्रह्मवचनेन 'यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत ।

अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम् । । परित्राणाय साधूनां विनाशाय च दुष्कृताम् । धर्मसंस्थापनार्थाय संभवामि युगे युगे' इति सर्वेषां विष्णवताराणां दुष्टनिग्रहशिष्टपरिपालनपूर्वकं धर्मप्रतिष्ठापकत्वप्रतिपादकगीतास्थभगवदूचनेन च धर्मज्ञत्वधर्मानुष्ठातृत्वधर्मस्वरूपत्वविशिष्टस्यैव रामस्य चरितं वर्णितमित्यवगम्यते । । ।

The uniqueness and purpose of this commentary is dealt with by Triyambakaraya in this introduction.

Meaning:

There are many commentaries on the Valmiki Ramayana. Some focus on the greatness of Lord Vishnu, while others focus on the greatness of Lord Shiva. However, the Ramayana was created to show us the path of Dharma. Therefore, this commentary is written to focus mainly on Dharma.

One might ask: "Isn't the Ramayana just the story of Rama? Where does it talk about Dharma and its purport?"

The answer is found in the following places in Ramayana:

- Valmiki's Question: Valmiki starts by asking, "who in this current world is a man of virtue and character"?
- Narada's answer: Rama guards his Dharma and the Dharma of all.
- Maricha's testimony: Even his enemy, Maricha, says in the Aranya Kanda that Rama is the "embodiment of Dharma."
- Shuka's Statement: Shuka, a spy of Ravana, says that Rama is someone who never leaves the path of Dharma.
- Rama's Own Words: (to kaikeyi) "I am equal to sages. I am not money minded. I purely adore Dharma alone".
- Lakshmana's Prayer: While fighting Indrajit, Lakshmana says, "If righteous and truthful in the world is Rama, then let this arrow drink the life of the evil Indrajit". And so it happened, proving Rama is the very form of Dharma.
- Brahma's Words: Lord Brahma tells Rama, "You are the Supreme Dharma for all the worlds."
- The Bhagavad Gita: Lord Krishna says that he takes an avatar in every era to protect Dharma.
- The Goal of Vishnu: The main purpose of Lord Vishnu's avatars is to destroy evil, protect the good, and establish Dharma.

Thus, we have seen how the commentator says Ramayana is a literature of Dharma. Now we'll see, "What is Dharma?", according to the commentator.

According to the commentator - What is Dharma:

His words: 'चोदनालक्षणोऽर्थो धर्मः' इति तु जैमिनिः । । Meaning: The injunctions found in shastra is Dharma. This is how Jaimini says. What Scriptures injunct us to do is Dharma and prohibit us not to do is Adharma.

On what basis do scriptures injunct and prohibit?

For that Commentator quotes Apastamba sutra:

आपस्तम्बाचार्यास्तु- 'यस्त्वार्याः क्रियमाणं प्रशंसन्ति स धर्मः यद्गर्हन्ते सोऽधर्मः'(1.7.7)इति

। Apastambar says: "Whatever **action the wise celebrate is Dharma**, and whatever they **scorn is Adharma**".

In Santanik tradition we have so many scriptures that deal with what to do and what not to do.

Primary authority among the scriptures

If one asks, 'Among all these scriptures, which should be given the primary authority? Which should be kept as the primary proof?', the commentator replies that the primary authority must be given only to the **Vedas**.

Commentator's words:

एतादृशे धर्मे प्रमाणं चतुर्विधम् - श्रुतिः स्मृतिः सदाचारः सतामात्मनस्तुष्टिरिति । नैतेषां धर्मे तुल्यवत्प्रामाण्यम् अपि तर्हि वेद एव स्वतन्त्रप्रमाणम्, तदनु स्मृतिः, तत आचारः, तत आत्मनस्तुष्टिरिति । तथा चापस्तम्बाचार्याः- 'विप्रतिषेधे श्रुतिलक्षणं बलीयः' इति

Meaning : In this Dharma, the authority is fourfold: **Shruti** (the Vedas), **Smriti** (conventional texts), **Sadachara** (the conduct of virtuous people), and **Atmanastushti** (the satisfaction of one's own conscience). These do not hold equal weight in determining Dharma. Instead, the Veda (Shruti) alone is the independent authority. Following the Vedas is the Smriti, then the conduct of the

virtuous, and finally, self-satisfaction. As Acharya Apastamba states: 'In the event of a conflict, the authority of the Vedas has more weightage.'

According to this commentator What place Ramayana has in this Dharma hierarchy?

His words: एकस्य पुरुषस्य कृत्स्नं चरित्रमाख्यायिकारूपेण क्रमेण केनापि न प्रतिपादितम् । तत्तु कस्यचित्पुरुषधौरेयस्य धर्मानुष्ठानकर्तुश्चरित्रमेकेन निबन्धेन कर्तव्यम्, तेन सर्वोऽपि सदाचारः प्रदर्शनीय इत्यभिसंधाय लोकोपकाराय रघुवरचरितं काव्यरूपेण कृतवान् । तत्र श्रीरामचरित्रवर्णनेन सदाचारलक्षणो धर्मः तात्पर्येण प्रतिपादितः ।

Meaning: There was no single book that showed all the Dharmas through the life story of just one person.

To show how one great leader practiced all these Dharmas in his daily life and to demonstrate his noble character and good behavior, Sage Valmiki wrote the **Srimad Ramayana** for the benefit of the whole world. By describing the life of Sri Rama, the main goal is to teach us the true meaning of right conduct

2.Contexts where Ramayana and smruthis coincide.

2.1. Sitakalyanam

In the context of Sita Kalyanam (the wedding of Sita), the commentator describes this marriage as a Prajapatya Vivaha. The explanation and relevant verses are as follows:

इयं सीता मम सुता “सहधर्मचरी तव” ।
प्रतीच्छ चैनां भद्रं ते पाणिं गृह्णीष्व पाणिना ॥

पतिव्रता महाभागा छायेवानुगता सदा ।
इत्युक्त्वा प्राक्षिपद्राजा मन्त्रपूतं जलं तदा ॥

Definition of Prajapatya Vivaha

A Prajapatya marriage is a union formed specifically for the two individuals to practice Dharma (righteous duties) together. Since Sri Rama and Sita married to uphold and adhere to Dharma, their marriage is classified as a Prajapatya wedding.

The commentator quotes from various texts:

आश्वलायनः- 'सह धर्म चरत इति प्राजापत्यः' इति । गौतमोऽपि - 'संयोगमन्त्रः प्राजापत्ये सह धर्म चर्यताम्' इति । मनुरपि - 'सहोभौ चरतां धर्ममिति वाचानुभाष्य च । कन्याप्रदानमभ्यर्थ्य प्राजापत्यो विधिः स्मृतः' इति । बोधायनोऽपि- 'आच्छाद्यालंकृत्यैषा सहधर्म चर्यतामिति प्राजापत्यः' इति ।

This interpretation is supported by several authorities, including Āśvalāyana, Gautama, Manusmṛti, and Bodhāyana. All of them emphasize that mutual dedication to Dharma is the defining characteristic of this type of marriage. Thus, in this context, the Rāmāyaṇa is fully aligned with conventional Dharma.

2.2. In Valivadha context:

The crime dealt in Valivadha context is “**the crime of incest**”. This very dangerous crime should not be found anywhere, especially if a king does this crime, he should be beheaded instantly. Kings are role models and their actions would be followed by all subjects. यद्वृत्ता स्सन्ति राजानस्तद्वृत्ता स्सन्ति हि प्रजाः । 2.109.9 । । meaning : As the kings behave, so too do the people behave.

Here Rama’s words from Valmiki Ramayana followed by its meaning:

- ज्येष्ठो भ्राता पिता चैव यश्च विद्यां प्रयच्छति । त्रयस्ते पितरो ज्ञेया धर्म्ये च पथि वर्तिनः । । 4.18.13 । ।
- यवीयानात्मनः पुत्रशशिष्यश्चापि गुणोदितः । पुत्रवत्ते त्रयश्चिन्त्या धर्मश्चेदत्रकारणम् । । 4.18.14 । ।
- सूक्ष्मः परमदुज्ञेयः सतां धर्मः प्लवङ्गम । हृदिस्थः सर्वभूतानामात्मा वेद शुभाशुभम् । । 4.18.15 । ।
- चपलश्चपलैः सार्धं वानरैरकृतात्मभिः । जात्यन्ध इव जात्यन्यैर्मन्त्रयन् द्रक्ष्यसे नु किम् । । 4.18.16 । ।

- अहं तु व्यक्ततामस्य वचनस्य ब्रवीमि ते । न हि मां केवलं रोषात्त्वं विगर्हितुमर्हसि ।।
।।4.18.17।।
- तदेतत्कारणं पश्य यदर्थं त्वं मया हतः। भ्रातुर्वर्तसि भार्यायां त्यक्त्वा धर्मं सनातनम्4.18.18।।
- अस्य त्वं धरमाणस्य सुग्रीवस्य महात्मनः।रुमायां वर्तसे कामात्स्रुषायां पापकर्मकृत्4.18.19।।
- तद्द्वयतीतस्य ते धर्मात्कामवृत्तस्य वानर।भ्रातृभार्यावमर्शोऽस्मिन्दण्डोऽयं प्रतिपादितः4.18.20।।
- न हि धर्मविरुद्धस्य लोकवृत्तादपेयुषः।दण्डादन्यत्र पश्यामि निग्रहं हरियूथप4.18.21।
- न हि ते मर्षये पापं क्षत्रियोऽहं कुलोद्भवः।औरसीं भगिनीं वापि भार्या वाप्यनुजस्य यः।प्रचरेत नरः
कामात्तस्य दण्डो वधः स्मृतः।।4.18.22।।

Meaning:

13.The elder brother, father and Guru- these three are considered as fathers, if they are in the path of Dharma. 14. The younger brother, son and virtuous disciple- these three should be considered as offspring, if Dharma is the reason. 15. Dharma of noble ones is subtle and not easily perceptible. The soul that dwells in the hearts of all beings knows what is right and what is wrong.16. You being crazy consult only the wavering and uncultured men. You are blind led by blinds. How can you judge me? 17. Let me reply to your question. You need not scold me out of wrath.19. See the reason why I have killed you. When Sugriva, the great soul is alive, you approach his wife Rumā who should be treated as your daughter-in-law with lust. 20. You have lost the conventional Dharma. I punished you as you took your brother's wife with lust.21.You are against Dharma and convention. I never see any punishment other than the capital one22. I cannot tolerate your fault. I am a royal and belong to a noble lineage

These meanings are taken from our Acharya Dr R.Rangaji's Webolim edition of Ramayana book.

Commentator Quotes from Apastamba sutra and Narada smruthi for the punishment of the crime of incest.

Apastamba sutra:

- “अबुद्धिपूर्वमलंकृतो युवा परदारमनुप्रविशन् कुमारी वा वाचा बाद्ध्यः, बुद्धिपूर्वं तु दुष्टभावो दण्ड्यः । सन्निपाते वृत्ते शिश्रुच्छेदनं सवृषणस्य”(2 .10.26.20) इति आपस्तंबसूत्रेण ।।
- Meaning: A young wicked man who, decked with ornaments enters a place where a married woman or an unmarried woman, must be afflicted. But if

he does it intentionally with a bad purpose, he must be punished. If he has actually committed adultery, his penis shall be cut off together with the testicles.

Note: the punishment which is given here is more likely to be inhuman but note that it is told in such a way to secure the women in their home and families.

Narada smruthi:

- माता मातृष्वसा श्वश्रूर्मातुलानी पितृष्वसा ।
पितृव्यसखि शिष्यस्त्री भगिनी तत्सखी स्रुषा ॥
- दुहिता चार्यभार्या च सगोला शरणागता ।
राज्ञी प्रव्रजिता धात्री साध्वी वर्णोत्तमा च या ॥
- आसामन्यतमां गच्छन् गुरुतल्पग उच्यते ।
शिश्नस्योत्कृन्तनात्तत्र नान्यो दण्डो विधीयते ॥

As the meaning of the same crime is given before, translation of the above slokas are not repeated here. Only few more relatives are added here who are not dealt in Apastamba sutra.

Smṛti texts, such as those attributed to Āpastamba and Nārada, prescribe severe punishments for such violations. Therefore, Rāma's action in this context aligns with the norms of conventional Dharma.

2.3 Bharatha's Oath

When Bharata returns to Ayodhya and discovers that Rama has been exiled, he is extremely shocked and upset. To prove his innocence to Kausalya, he utters a series of curses. Bharata says. "whoever consents to Rama's exile, may all these heavy sins befall upon him".

Here are those verses and the commentaries with explanation:

कृता शास्त्रानुगा बुद्धिर्मा भूतस्य कदाचन ।
सत्यसन्धः सतां श्रेष्ठो यस्मार्योऽनुमते गतः ।।2.75.20 ।।

May he, who wishes Rama's exile, not resolve to follow the Vedic texts.

अनेन सच्छात्राविश्वासः पापाधायक इत्युक्तं भवति । तथा चानुशासनिके-
'यः प्रवृत्तां श्रुतिं शास्त्रं वा मुनिभिः कृतम् ।
दूषयत्यनभिज्ञाय तं विद्याद्वह्नघातकम्' इति ।।

By this, distrust in good scriptures is considered a sin.
Anushanika says- The one who refuses to trust vedas or any wise man's
scripture, his sin is equivalent that of a Bramhahathi (killing of a Brahmin)

प्रेष्यं पापीयसां यातु सूर्यं च प्रतिमेहतु ।
हन्तु पादेन गां सुप्तं यस्मार्योऽनुमते गतः ।।2.75.21 ।।

21. May the one who consents to Rama's exile get the sin of harming a cow by
trampling it while it sleeps.

आपस्तम्बोऽपि - 'देवतानां राज्ञः ब्राह्मणस्य गोरिति पदोपस्पर्शनं वर्जयेत्'
Apastamba also says that it is prohibited to kick deity status, king and cow.

अत्र पापीयसां निकृष्टानां सेवनं पापाधायक- मित्यवगम्यते । तथा उद्योगपर्वणि-
उत्तमानेव सेवेत प्राप्तकाले तु मध्यमान् ।
अधर्मास्तु न सेवेत यदीच्छेद् गतिमात्मनः ॥

Serving the wicked will never lead one to a good course. This is how udyoga
parva says.

(Serving a wicked is considered as sin by Bharatha, also as well as Smruthi
texts. So here they go hand-in-hand)

3. The contexts where Ramayana do not agree with smruthi texts.

3.1. Kowsalya's Agni-upasana (ritual fire worship)

Here the commentator's view is given below

अथवा स्वयमेवाहं सुमित्रानुचरा सुखम् ॥ अग्निहोत्रं पुरस्कृत्य प्रस्थास्ये यत्र राघवः ॥ (2.75.13)

ननु 'अग्निहोत्रं पुरस्कृत्य प्रस्थास्ये यत्र राघवः इत्युक्तम् । तदनुपपन्नम् । मृते भर्तारि तत्संस्कारस्यावश्यकर्तव्यत्वेन संस्कार्यस्य राज्ञः संस्कारकर्तुं भरतस्य च संनिधाने तावानादृत्य वनं प्रत्यग्निहोत्रनयनस्य अयुक्तत्वात् । न च ज्येष्ठस्यैवाधिकारात्, 'भरतः प्रेतकार्याणि मा स्म कार्षीद्गतायुषः' इति पित्रा प्रतिषिद्धस्य भरतस्यानधिकारात् भर्तृशरीरं गृहीत्वा रामसमीपं गच्छामीत्येतदभिप्रायेणोक्तमिति वाच्यम् । तर्हि अग्रेऽपि भरतेन संस्कारो न कर्तव्यः स्यात् । किं च, कैकेयीं परित्यज्य कौसल्यासुमित्राभ्यामपि नयनमनुपपन्नम् । अश्वमेधादिकृतसंबन्धेन पत्नीत्वात्, अतः केवलाग्नीनां संस्कार्यसहितानां वनं प्रति नयनमनुपपन्नमेवेति चेन्न । प्रियं चेद्भरतस्यैव तद्रामप्रव्राजनं भवेत् । 'मा स्म मे भरतः कार्षीत् प्रेतकृत्यं गतायुषः' इति राजवचनात् रामगमनमङ्गीकुर्वतो भरतस्य पितृसंस्कारेऽनधिकारात् भरतकृतशपथात्प्राक्तदाशयस्याज्ञानात् रामसमीपमेव संस्कार्येण स हाग्नीनां नयनं युक्तम् । यथोक्तं कैकेय्या अपि पत्नीत्वात्तया विना कथमग्नीनां नयनम् इति तदपि न । कौसल्याया ज्येष्ठत्वात् 'ज्येष्ठा चेदग्निसंयुक्ता ह्यान्या गच्छेद्यथासुखम्' इति वचनेन ज्येष्ठाया एवाग्निसंबन्धावगमात् 'अगृह्णां यञ्च ते पाणिमग्निं पर्यणयं च यत् । अनुजानामि तत्सर्वमस्मिल्लोके परत्र च । केवलार्थपरां हित्वा त्यक्तधर्मा त्यजाम्यहम् इत्यादिवचनपर्यालोचनया कैकेय्याः परित्यागावगमाच्च तां परित्यज्याप्यग्नीनां नयने बाधकाभावात् । तस्मात् 'अग्निहोत्रं पुरस्कृत्य प्रस्थास्ये यत्र राघवः' इति वचनं युक्तमेव । अत एवाग्रे भरतकृतशपथैरवगत तदाशया कौसल्या भरतकृतं भर्तृसंस्कारमभ्युपेत्य वनं न गतवती इति ।

The Objection of the Commentator (Purvapaksha)

The statement, "I shall set out to where Rama is, taking along the Agnihotra (sacred fires) with me," appears to be improper. When a husband dies,

performing his last rites is an obligatory duty. Since both the deceased King (the subject of the ritual) and Bharata (the one meant to perform it) were present, it seems inappropriate to ignore the funeral and carry away the sacred Agnihotra fires to the forest.

One might argue that Bharata was disqualified because the King specifically commanded, "*Let not Bharata perform my funeral rites,*" and that the rights belonged only to the eldest son, Rama. However, if that were the case, Bharata should not have been allowed to perform the rites later either. Furthermore, leaving Kaikeyi behind while taking Kausalya and Sumitra is problematic. Since Kaikeyi was also a legal wife, taking the sacred fires, excluding other wives, seems to violate scriptural norms.

The Answer for that objection

The objection is incorrect; Kausalya's statement is indeed valid for the following reasons:

- **Bharata's Eligibility:** King Dasharatha had declared, "*If this exile of Rama is pleasing to Bharata, then let him not perform my last rites.*" At that moment, Kausalya did not yet know Bharata's true intentions or his devotion to Rama. Therefore, it was logical for her to think that the fires and the King's body should be taken to Rama, the rightful eldest son.
- **The Status of Kaikeyi:** Regarding the exclusion of Kaikeyi, the scriptures state that the eldest wife (*Jyeshtha*) is the primary partner in Agnihotra rituals. If she is present, the others may follow as they please.
- **The King's Renunciation:** More importantly, King Dasharatha had explicitly renounced Kaikeyi, saying, "*I abandon the hand I took in marriage and the fire we circled together... I renounce her who is interested only in her own selfish ends and has abandoned Dharma.*" Given this formal repudiation, there was no spiritual barrier to taking the fires while leaving her behind.

Conclusion of the Commentator for Kausalya's Fire worship: Therefore, Kausalya's initial intent to take the Agnihotra fires to Rama was entirely appropriate. It was only later, after Bharata proved his innocence through his solemn oaths, that Kausalya recognized his sincerity, accepted his right to perform the funeral, and chose to stay back.

However, Valmiki Ramayana diverges in this context:

Kausalya's Ritual fire worship Observed in the Valmiki Ramayana

1. Independent Fire Worship (Agnihotra)

In the Ayodhya Kanda (Sargas 20.15-19 and 25.26-29), Kausalya is depicted performing her own fire worship.

सा क्षौमवसना हृष्टा नित्यं व्रतपरायणा । अग्निं जुहोति स्म तदा मन्त्रवत् कृतमङ्गला ॥(2.20.15)

प्रविश्य च तदा रामो मातुरन्तः पुरं शुभम् । ददर्श मातरं तत्र हावयन्तीं हुताशनम् ॥(2.20.16)

देवकार्यनिमित्तं च तत्रापश्यत् समुद्यतम् । दध्यक्षतं घृतं चैव मोदकान् हविषस्तथा ॥(2.20.17)

लाजान् माल्यानि शुक्लानि पायसं कृसरं तथा । समिधः पूर्णकुम्भांश्च ददर्श रघुनन्दनः ॥(2.20.18)

तां शुक्लक्षौमसंवीतां व्रतयोगेन कर्षिताम् । तर्पयन्तीं ददर्शाद्भिर्देवतां देववर्णिनीम् ॥(2.20.19)

Meaning:

Thus she worships the divinities by flowers and incense and also with divine hymns. 27. She brings fire with the help of a priest and offers oblations for the welfare of Rama. 28. Kausalyä offers ghee, white flowers, fire sticks and white mustard in worship. 29. The priest guides her to perform all the rituals. Then she offers the desired fee to the priest.

Specifically, when Rama approaches her to deliver the news of his exile, he finds her engaged in a sacrificial ceremony. This suggests that she maintained a dedicated ritual space and performed offerings to the deities for the welfare of her son and the kingdom, even when King Dasharatha was not present all around.

इति माल्यैः सुरगणान् गन्धैश्चापि यशस्विनी । स्तुतिभिश्चानुकूलाभिरानर्चायतलोचना
॥2.25.26॥

ज्वलनं समुपादाय ब्राह्मणेन महात्मना । हावयामास विधिना राममङ्गलकारणात् ॥2.25.27

घृतं श्वेतानि माल्यानि समिधः श्वेतसर्षपान् । उपसम्पादयामास कौसल्या परमाङ्गना ।।2.25.28

उपाध्यायः स विधिना हुत्वा शान्तिमनामयम् । हुतहव्यावशेषेण बाह्यं बलिमकल्पयत् ।।2.25.29

26. She worships the divinities by flowers and incense and also with divine hymns. 27. She brings fire with the help of a priest and offers oblations for the welfare of Rama. 28. Kausalyā offers ghee, white flowers, fire sticks and white mustard in worship. 29. The priest guides her to perform all the rituals. Then she offers the desired fee to the priest.

(These meanings are taken from our Acharya Dr R.Rangaji's Webolim edition of Ramayana book)

Therefore, we derive that Kousalya performs agnihotra independently in solitude.

2. Proficiency in Vedic Mantras and Meditation

Kausalya's blessings to Rama before his departure are steeped in Vedic tradition. Her use of specific mantras and her adherence to daily spiritual disciplines—such as Pranayama (breath control), meditation on Lord Janardhana (Vishnu), and fire rituals—indicate a profound familiarity with the Vedas. This is explicitly noted in Ayodhya Kanda, where her piety is described as constant and unwavering. प्राणायामेन पुरुषं ध्यायमाना जनार्दनम् ।।(2.4.33)

3. Rama's Instructions to Sumantra

During his journey into exile, Rama specifically instructs the charioteer Sumantra to deliver a message to Mother Kausalya. He requests that she remain steadfast in her devotion and continue her daily engagement in ritual fire worship. Rama viewed her spiritual practice as a source of strength for her and protection for him.

धर्मनित्या यथाकालमग्न्यगारपरा भव । देवि देवस्य पादौ च देववत् परिपालय ।।(2.58.18)

4. Commitment to the Sacred Fire

When Bharata returns to Ayodhya, Kausalya expresses her deep grief and her desire to leave for the forest to be with Rama. In her resolve, she mentions her

intention to take her Ritual Fire (Agni) and Sumitra with her. This highlights that her identity as a practitioner of these rites was inseparable from her daily life, regardless of her location.

अथवा स्वयमेवाहं सुमित्रानुचरा सुखम् ॥ अग्निहोत्रं पुरस्कृत्य प्रस्थास्ये यत्र राघवः ॥(2.75.13)

3.2 Sita's Sandhya vandanam(a morning vedic ritual).

In this section, we are going to examine the Dharma-kūṭa Commentary.

Here a doubt arises: do women have the practice of Sandhyāvandanam? Is it prescribed for them or not?

Sandhyāvandanam is a Veda-prescribed ritual. Conventionally, women are not given Vedic study (adhikāra for the Vedas). If that is the case, how can Sandhyāvandanam be applicable to women?

At this point, the author of the Dharma-kūṭa Commentary takes up this issue and examines it in detail.

द्विविधाः स्त्रियः- ब्रह्मवादिन्या सद्योवध्वश्चेति । ब्रह्मवादिनीनामुपनयनवेदाध्ययनादिकमस्त्येष । सद्योवधूनां तु अध्ययनाद्यभावः । तथा च हारीतः -- 'द्विविधाः स्त्रियो । ब्रह्मवादिन्यः सद्योवध्वश्चेति । तत्र ब्रह्मवादिनीनामुपनयनमग्नीन्धनं वेदाध्ययनं स्वगृहे च भिक्षाचर्येति । सद्योवधूनामुपनते विवाहे कथंचिदुपनयनमात्रं कृत्वा विवाहः कार्यः' इति । एतदभिप्रायणैव याज्ञवल्क्यभार्याद्वैविध्यमुक्तं बृहदारण्यके- ' अथ ह याज्ञवल्क्यस्य द्वे भार्ये बभूवतुःमैत्रेयी च कात्यायनी च । तयोः मैत्रेयी ब्रह्मवादिनी बभूव । स्त्रीप्रज्ञैव तर्हि कात्यायनी ।' इति ॥

There are two types of women: Brahmavadinis and Sadyovadhush.

For the Brahmavadinis, there are rituals such as the Upanayana (sacred thread ceremony), the study of the Vedas, and other related practices. For the Sadyovadhush, however, there is an absence of such formal study.

Accordingly, the sage Harita states:

'Women are of two types: Brahmavadinis and Sadyovadhus. Among them, the Brahmavadinis have the right to Upanayana, tending the sacred fire (Agni-indhanam), studying the Vedas, and practicing alms-seeking (Bhiksha-charya) within their own homes. As for the Sadyovadhus, when their marriage is imminent, the wedding should be performed after conducting only a brief Upanayana ceremony.'

It is with this very distinction in mind that the two types of wives of Yajnavalkya are mentioned in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad:

'Now, Yajnavalkya had two wives: Maitreyi and Katyayani. Of those two, Maitreyi was a Brahmavadini (a seeker of spiritual knowledge), whereas Katyayani possessed only the common worldly wisdom of women (Stri-prajna).'

Now, let us look at it according to the Valmiki Ramayana.

There are many places where women do Vedic rituals like Sandhya vandanam Tarpanam etc. And also Ramayana doesn't talk about Bramhavadini Vadhu and Sadhyo Vadhu. It just records the women like Sita and Kousalya who have practiced the Vedic rituals like Sandhya Vandana etc.

In the Valmiki Ramayana, in this section, in the context we are looking at now, Hanuman says, "In this place, Sita Devi will come to perform Sandhyavandanam." Furthermore, before this, it is mentioned in the Ayodhya Kanda that all three—Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita—performed the Sandhyavandanam together.

ततस्तु जलशेषेण लक्ष्मणोऽप्यकरोत्तदा ।

वाग्यतास्ते त्रय स्सन्ध्यां समुपासत संहिताः ।।2.87.18 ।।

Furthermore, all three—Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita—performed Agni worship at the ashram of Sutikshna, and after that, they worshipped the Devas.

अथ तेऽग्निं सुरांश्चैव वैदेही रामलक्ष्मणौ ।

काल्यं विधिवदभ्यर्च्य तपस्विशरणे वने ।।3.8.3 ।।

Also Dasharatha resolves to Kaikeyi “O woman of bad deed! May you with your son not perform funeral rites or 'Tarpana' (offering water as oblations to the manes) if you stop Rama's coronation”.

त्वया सपुत्रया नैव कर्तव्या सलिलक्रिया । व्याहन्तास्यशुभाचारे यदि रामाभिषेचनम् ॥ 12.14.171

This shows that women in Ramayana have the right to do Tarpanam.

Furthermore, it is mentioned in the Ayodhya Kanda that the wives of Dasharatha—namely Kaushalya, Kaikeyi, and Sumitra—after Dasharatha's death, performed Tarpana for Dasharatha and then returned.

कृत्वोदकं ते भरतेन सार्धं नृपाङ्गना मन्त्रिपुरोहिताश्च ।

पुरंप्रविश्याश्रुपरीतनेत्राः भूमौ दशाहं व्यनयन्त दुःखम् ॥ 12.76.23 ॥

Ramayana also deals with Vedic rituals performed across the caste.

For example, Ramayana talks about a boy, who was the son of a Sudra-woman performing Sandhyāvandana and fire ritual.

को मां सन्ध्यामुपास्यैव स्नात्वा हुतहुताशनः ।

श्लाघयिष्यत्युपासीनः पुत्र शोकभयार्दितम् ॥ 12.64.34 ॥

Additionally, it is mentioned in the Ayodhya Kanda that the charioteer Sumantra also performed Sandhyavandanam.

उपास्य तु शिवां सन्ध्यां दृष्ट्वा रात्रिमुपस्थिताम् ।

रामस्य शयनं चक्रे सूतः सौमित्रिणा सह ॥ 12.46.13 ॥

And also Ramayana doesn't talk about Bramhavadini Vadhu and Sadhyo Vadhu. It just records the women like Sita and Kousalya who have practiced the Vedic rituals like Sandhya Vandana etc.

Thus, we've seen that Ramayana doesn't match with smruthi texts. In the upcoming passages we are going to see the deeper aspects of Dharma (which is

Universal welfare) and its difference with Dharma of Vidhi Nisheda(injunctions and prohibitions).

3.3 The difference between Conventional Dharma and the “Real” Dharma:

Conventional Dharma’s features:

Conventional Dharma is the Dharma of proper conduct of elders, which is based on injunctions and prohibitions—in other words, it is a set of statements about what must be done and what must not be done.

This Dharma is considered as being prescribed only for certain people or, alternatively, it is seen as something to be avoided by certain people.

Moreover, the Manusmriti states that this Dharma is prescribed for the people living on the banks of the rivers Drishadvati and Saraswati.(सरस्वतीदृषद्वत्योःदेवनद्योर्यदन्तरम्।)(Manu.2.17)

Furthermore, this dharma is such that it is based on the path followed by the elders, and it is filled with rules and regulations prescribed by the scriptures written by them—apart from this, it can't be conceived by our own intellect.

At times, it can be seen that this also carries anti-human values

Therefore, when the Smritis contradict the Veda in certain aspects—that is, sometimes when these Smritis deal with conventional dharma it goes against the Vedic mantras. Therefore our elders have stated that if contradiction happens between the Vedic mantras and Smriti text, then Vedic mantras themselves should be taken as the authority.

From this, it is evident that sometimes the Smriti text is not suitable for us.

Universal Welfare-based Dharma

What is Dharma in general?

While what we have seen in conventional dharma has been prescribed for a particular group of people in a specific area during a certain time period, Dharma in the intention of universal welfare is beyond time, location, and even people. These principles are those rooted in human centric values such as brotherhood, humility, calmness, servitude, love, friendship, etc which are common to all castes and creeds which can solely be defined as Dharma.

The Dharma that is described in the Ramayana is based on universal welfare. This is the Dharma that could be followed by everyone. This is not something that applies only to a few and not to others.

As Valmiki says “यावत्स्थास्यन्ति गिरयः सरितश्च महीतले तावद्रामायणकथा लोकेषु प्रचरिष्यति” meaning-- “As long as there are mountains and rivers, this Ramayana will remain in this world”. As Ramayana expounds Dharma of Universal welfare, this Dharma will also exist as long as this Ramayana exist. Beyond ages, beyond regions this Dharma of Universal welfare will exist due to Ramayana’s existence. So we can derive that the Dharma shown in Ramayana is always relevant to everyone at all times.

Moreover, what we see from this is that the Ramayana, or the Dharma shown in the Ramayana, is not merely a set of rules that is to be practiced only in one location, or at one time, or in one space.

Additionally, in the Ramayana, Vibhishana says, “ततः शास्त्रविपश्चित्वं श्रम एव हि केवलम्” . This means, “even if you have studied so many scriptures,(if one does not understand the Dharma), then all the studies are in vain.

Moreover, when Lord Rama kills Vali, he says, “ हृदिस्थः सर्वभूतानामात्मा वेद शुभाशुभम्”(4.18.15), meaning that Dharma is not something that changes from person to person; Dharma is that which is inherent in the heart of all beings and is known to our own conscience and inner self. From this we can derive its

intended meaning that Dharma is the most objective thing and it is completely common to all.

And also, in the book “What is Dharma” our Dr Rangaji had written that Rama transgresses Conventional Dharma.-Rāma did not prioritize Kula-dharma too. Vasiṣṭha says to Rama, "The convention in the lineage of Ikṣvāku is to crown the eldest. O glorious Rāma! Break not this conventional Dharma. Rule the kingdom like your father. (Rāmāyaṇam, 2.110.36.)But Rama broke this conventional practice to uphold the oath which was given to Kaikeyi by Dhasharatha. So Rama gives importance to the truth which is deeply rooted in humanity.

Additionally, Kings in the lineage of Rama had the practice of hunting. But Rama says this

“The archers had chosen hunting in due course of time as entertainment. I do not have a high liking for hunting. This is the conventional practice of the royals. Hunting is loved and performed by the royals with bows.”(2.49.16,17) this is also a place where he transgresses conventional practice because killing other lives without any purpose is inhuman.

Furthermore, a text called the Gautama Dharma Sutra states certain 8 virtues. It says that a person who lacks these 8 virtues, no matter how much ritual practice they perform ; they will not attain the world which is the fruit of Yajna. These 8 virtues are also human values.

अथाष्टावात्मगुणाःदया सर्वभूतेषु क्षान्तिरनसूया शौच मनायासो मङ्गलमकार्पण्यमस्पृहेति । यस्यैते चत्वारिंशत्संस्कारा न चाष्टावात्मगुणा न स ब्रह्मणःसालोक्यं च गच्छति । यस्य तु खलु चत्वारिंशत्संस्काराणामेकशोऽपि अष्टावात्मगुणाःअथ स ब्रह्मणः सायुज्यं सालोक्यं च गच्छति' इति । (Gautama Dharma sutra-8.20)

Now, the eight virtues of the self are:

compassion towards all beings, forgiveness, absence of envy, purity, effortlessness (freedom from strain), auspiciousness, generosity (absence of miserliness), and absence of desire.

A person who possesses all the forty sacraments (saṁskāras) but does not have these eight inner virtues of self—
such a person does not attain the world of Brahman (Brahma-loka).

But indeed, even if a person possesses only some of the forty sacraments, yet has these eight virtues—
that person attains union with Brahman (sāyujya) and also reaches the world of Brahman (sāloka).”

Additionally, in Ramayana it is told that “ साक्षाद्रामात् विनिर्वृत्तः धर्मश्चापि श्रिया सह” meaning—the Dharma, with auspiciousness, is manifested from Rama himself. This is because every action taken by Rama is not based on his own likes and dislikes, but based on the pure intentions to do welfare for others. In this way he lived for others' well being. सत्यं च धर्मं च पराक्रमं च भूतानुकम्पां प्रियवादितां च । द्विजातिदेवातिथिपूजनं च पन्थानमाहुस्त्रिदिवस्य सन्तः । 12.109.31 । । meaning – “The virtuous upholds that truthfulness, Dharma, valour, compassion towards all beings, speaking kind words, paying homage to gods, priests and poor ones –all these are paths to heaven”.

This clearly shows that he is living Dharma-based life, not a selfishness based one.

He himself says –वनवासं वसन्नेव शुचिर्नियतभोजनः ।मूलपुष्पफलैः पुण्यैः पित्रून् देवांश्च तर्पयन् । 12.109.26 । ।

सन्तुष्टपञ्चवर्गोऽहं लोकयात्रां प्रवर्तये ।अकुहश्चरद्भ्रूधानस्सन्कार्याकार्यविचक्षणः । 12.109.27 । । meaning– “I shall spend the term of my forest life with sincerity and holiness and purity of mind and with regulated food and with ancestors and gods satisfied with offerings of roots, flowers and fruits, with my five senses contented and with a mind that discriminates between what ought to be done and what ought not to be done”. This clearly shows how Rama is the embodiment of Dharma. His selflessness and living for the well being of all itself shows us the path of Righteousness. There is no need of any other scripture to prove Rama is Dharamatma other than Ramayana.

Conclusion:

While conventional dharma intends to uphold Dharma through injunctions and prohibitions, there are instances where it deviates from Universal Welfare as shown through the examples above. Using the Ramayana as our ultimate guide to understand the true nature of Dharma, it becomes clear on which actions are rooted in Universal welfare and those which are not. Those human values and principles transcend any distinction such as time or religion. They are common to all. Given conventional Dharma's finite capacity to prescribe actions, one must neither attempt to bring the Ramayana under its proposed framework nor relinquish the Ramayana in favour of its perspectives when in contradiction.

Dharma is deeply ingrained within our own nature. By recognizing the expansive nature of the Ramayana as it is, we can realise this Dharma which further impels us to be in the path of Universal Welfare.